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ABSTRACT

Aural comprehension tests, which are designed so that the student can give non-vocal reactions to orally-presented problems are valuable for two reasons: they provide the teacher of English with an objective and accurate measure of the pupils' comprehension and can also be given simultaneously to a large group of students. According to the author, it is very important that this kind of test be properly prepared, taking into consideration that the structured oral approach must use meaningful alternatives based on expressions already practiced in class. These tests are best administered with a tape recorder or a language laboratory to eliminate possible subjectivity in the teacher's voice, and are apparently most successful when the answer form is completion, single response, or supplying a sentence to describe a situation. When using contrastive elements, it is best not to give widely varying alternatives; although three alternatives are preferable some structures will not permit this. The author further suggests ways of preparing the test script so it will be meaningful and ways of checking the reliability of the test itself. He emphasizes that the aural comprehension test cannot measure a student's speaking ability. (FB)

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AURAL COMPREHENSION TESTS AND HOW TO PREPARE THEM

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Aural comprehension tests can be defined as language tests which require of the student non-vocal reactions to problems presented orally. When properly constructed, such tests are an excellent means of giving the teacher of spoken English an objective and accurate quantitative assessment of his students' progress in aural ability; and, when presented in multiple choice form, they are easy to give simultaneously to a large number of students with much time saved in the task of grading.

An example familiar to most English teachers in Japan is the Sound Perception Test used to test a student's ability to distinguish problem phonemes in the English sound system. In its most common form, the student hears three sentences, one of which differs from the other two only in the phoneme contrast being tested. The student might hear, for example:

A. Did you write it?
*B. Did you light it?
C. Did you write it?

If he is able to distinguish the phonemes /r/ and /l/, he will then mark the letter B on his answer sheet. Similar techniques can also be used to test discrimination of other phonemic contrasts such as sentence stress and intonation.

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It is not the purpose of this paper to deal with aural comprehension tests on sound structure. The focus is rather on the testing of grammatical structure, and of vocabulary insofar as problem words are related to specific structures. The purpose, then, is to discuss the various factors which must be taken into account when preparing aural comprehension tests on grammatical structure and to provide guidelines for teachers who wish to prepare their own tests of this type. Since the field of testing is very wide, the discussion will be limited to the case of the teacher using a structured oral approach with one or more groups of students at beginning or intermediate levels. This is probably the most common situation in Japanese schools which have adopted a linguistic approach to English teaching, and it is also

the situation in which scientific testing methods can be most beneficial.

At this stage, it is important to point out that the type of test to be considered here is one in which meaning plays an important role. In this aspect it differs considerably from the sound perception test briefly described above. In such a test, many linguists could agree that it would be equally valid to test auditory discrimination between /r/ and /l/ by using, for example:

I want a runk. - I want a lunk. - I want a runk.

the fact that "runks" and "lunks" do not correspond to any reality being immaterial. In the case of grammatical structure tests, however, it is not usually possible, nor advisable, to try to isolate structure in a chemically pure state divorced from meaning. In an example such as:

He took up English... A. well B. hard C. gladly

it is obvious that, in order to select the correct completion C, the student must have a very clear understanding of the meaning of the verb *take up* and of the usage of the adverbs given. On the other hand, meaning must be tested in relation to specific patterns, and that is why it is necessary to use a structural analysis as the basis for tests of this type.

WHAT TO TEST

From the foregoing it is clear that the material to be tested must be described in terms of grammatical structures or patterns, NOT on the basis of the number of vocabulary items taught or language situations encountered. In the case under consideration, the teacher will know that the structures to be tested are those which to date have already been practised in the classroom. It would be linguistically unsound and certainly unfair to the students to set problems involving structures not yet formally dealt with, and then trust to luck that the students had somehow become familiar with them outside of the class.

Since it is assumed that the method of teaching is linguistically structured, the deciding of what to test should not be difficult, as the textbook would presumably present the different patterns systematically.

MODE OF PRESENTATION

In order to clarify the different techniques of testing to be described, it is helpful to point out at this stage that the type of test envisaged is a recorded one to be given in a language laboratory or with the aid of a classroom tape recorder of sufficiently high fidelity. The advantage of this is that it removes another subjective element from the test, for,if it is read out in the classroom, there is a danger that sympathy for the students may more or less unconsciously cause the the teacher to slow down his delivery or artificially emphasize certain features. The machine on the other hand is inexorable and admits of no appeal. Another advantage is that the same test can be given to several classes under standard conditions and be used several times in succeeding courses. In schools with several teachers giving the same course it would perhaps be better to have someone who is not actually teaching record the test so that the conditions are equal for all students. If this cannot be done, it is usually possible to arrive at some compromise.

FORM OF PRESENTATION

Assuming that the test is based on the multiple choice system with three alternatives A, B and C, the questions can be presented in several different forms, the choice of form being usually determined by the particular structure being tested. A number of different forms will now be considered.

A. Choose the correct completion.

The students hear the first part of a sentence which is then completed in three different ways, only one of which is correct. The following examples illustrate this technique:

(1) I watched television....
A. tomorrow *B. last night C. now

(2) We've studied English....
*A. for one year B. one year ago
C. after one year

(3) Mr. Tanaka took up English....
A. well B. hard *C. gladly

(4) I don't have to get up early....
*A. but I intend to B. but I must
C. but I don't want to

(5) I must go now, but I wish....
A. I mustn't *B. I didn't have to
C. I wouldn't

(6) I'd go to Hawaii....
A. if I have enough money
B. if I'd had enough money
*C. if I had enough money

(7) I'm very keen....
*A. on going B. for going C. at going

(8) You heard the news....
A. don't you? *B. didn't you? C. aren't you?

(9) There won't be any classes next week....
A. won't there? B. will they? *C. will there?

(10) She never arrives on time....
*A. does she? B. doesn't she? C. isn't she?

(11) The students repeat the sentences....
A. doesn't he? *B. don't they? C. do they?

(12) The teachers were busy when we came....
A. didn't we? B. don't they? *C. weren't they?

These examples illustrate the testing of the students recognition and understanding of tenses (1, 2), adverbs of manner (3), connected sentences (4, 5), verb forms employed after WISH and in conditional sentences (5, 6), and prepositions (7). The use of tag questions (8-12) is especially useful for testing verb forms, the distinction between singular and plural (11), and the recognition of the main verbs in complex sentences (12).

The completion technique can be modified by having the students choose one incorrect completion. For example:

(13) We've studied English....
A. for one year B. since last year
*C. one year ago

B. Choose the correct response.

The students hear a statement or question followed by

three responses, only one of which is correct. A great variety of structual and vocabulary problems can be tested in this way, the following examples being typical.

(14) Are the words difficult? *A. No, they aren't.
B. Yes, it is. C. Yes, they do.

(15) Is the train fast? A. No, it's early.
B. No, it's quick. *C. No, it's slow.

(16) Did you see Mary? A. Yes, I saw it.
*B. Yes, I saw her. C. Yes, I see her.

(17) Did you buy the tickets? A. Yes, I bought it.
*B. Yes, I bought them. C. Yes, I bought one.

(18) I'm looking for a policeman.
*A. There's one over there.
B. He's over there. C. They're over there.

(19) Did you get any information? A. Yes, I got one.
B. Yes, I got a few. *C. Yes, I got a little.

(20) Are you going to buy a car?
A. No, but I intend to. B. No, but I have to.
*C. No, but I'd like to.

(21) There's a fire in the kitchen.
*A. Please put it out. B. Please put it off.
C. Please leave it out.

(22) Is that your textbook? A. Yes, it's yours.
*B. Yes, it's mine. C. No, it isn't yours.

(23) May I sit here? A. No, not at all.
B. That's very kind of you. *C. Please do.

A variation of this technique is to have the students listen to the answer to a question and then choose the question corresponding to that answer. An example involving interrogative words is:

(24) Mr. Tanaka goes to Tokyo three or four times a month.
A. Where does Mr. Tanaka go in Tokyo?
*B. How often does Mr. Tanaka go to Tokyo?
C. When does Mr. Tanaka go to Tokyo?

C. Choose the correct sentence based on a situation.

The situation may vary in length from a single sentence to a short paragraph. The students listen to it one or more

times after which they hear three sentences only one of which fits the situation. The following examples illustrate this technique.

(25) Not many of the books are expensive. Therefore:
A. A few of the books are cheap.
*B. Most of the books are cheap.
C. One of the books is cheap.

(26) Ken laughed at Bill's joke.
A. Bill was amused. B. Ken was amusing.
*C. Ken was amused.

(27) Bill met Ken on the campus. "Where are you going, Ken?", he asked. "I'm going to class," replied Ken.
A. Ken told Bill where to go.
B. Ken told Bill to go to class.
*C. Ken told Bill where he was going.

(28) I studied in the library until lunch time. Then I went out.
*A. I studied in the library before having lunch.
B. I left the library after having lunch.
C. I had lunch before leaving the library.

(29) I wanted my brother to take up English, but he decided to study French.
A. I got my brother to take up English.
*B. I urged my brother to take up English.
C. I persuaded my brother to take up French.

(30) John is sleeping in class again.
A. He must be studying.
B. He couldn't be tired.
*C. He should be paying attention.

(31) John's car cost $2,000, Peter's cost $3,000.
*A. John's car isn't as expensive as Peter's.
B. Peter's car is cheaper than John's.
C. John's car cost more than Peter's.

(32) It's not advisable to talk about politics here.
*A. Politics should be avoided here.
B. Politics cannot be neglected here.
C. Politics may be discussed here.

It is also possible to make one situation the basis for several questions. The following illustrates the testing of the

students knowledge of the possessive.

"George Kennedy is a businessman. His wife's name is Ellen. His partner is Walter Moore and his secretary's name is Miss Susan Green."

(33) What is Walter Moore?
*A. He's a businessman. B. He's a secretary.
C. He's Mr. Kennedy's partner.

(34) Whose boss is Mr. Kennedy?
A. Ellen's. B. Walter's. *C. Susan's.

(35) Who is Ellen's husband's partner?
A. Susan. B. George. *C. Walter.

In a problem of this type it would be necessary to let the students hear the passage at least twice before having them choose the correct answers to the questions.

THE CHOICE OF CONTRASTING ELEMENTS

In preparing a test of this nature, it is important to keep the choices available to the student within a definite structural range and not to confront him with widely disparate forms, many of which could be eliminated by common sense alone. Suppose, for instance, that the example (30) above were presented as follows:

John is sleeping in class again.
A. He must be studying.
B. He couldn't be tired.
*C. He is a lazy student.

In it's original form, this problem was designed to test the student's understanding of the pattern: MODAL + BE + COMPLEMENT. However, by applying common sense, most students would know that, in the new form, C was the correct answer without having to know the required pattern. The same could be said of example (26), if the third choice were given as, for example: *The joke was funny.*

It is necessary, therefore, always to keep in mind the structures which the learner confuses because of interference from his native language, and it is precisely those structures which must be tested. When the text being used is already structured with a view to teaching Japanese stu-

dents,--as should always be the case if a genuine linguistic approach is employed--the teacher can easily make a list of the patterns already covered, and it only remains to put them in a suitable form for testing by using the techniques illustrated above.

TECHNIQUES EMPLOYING VISUAL AIDS

The techniques considered so far have been completely oral in that the student does not require any written material and merely reacts to what he hears by marking a letter on his answer sheet. Various modifications can be employed which introduce visual aids.

The student can be given a picture and required to choose correct answers to questions related to it. For example, a picture illustrating an arrangement of objects could be used for testing command of prepositions of place and position. The student can be given a written passage to read and then choose answers to questions given orally. Again, a series of problems can be given which involve one of only three or four standard answers. For example, in testing the ability to form simple questions from statements, the student can be given an explanation sheet containing the information:

A = Is...? B = Are...? C = Does...? D = Do...?

The student would then hear a series of statements which he would have to convert mentally into interrogative form. If the question he forms begins with IS, he would mark A; if it began with ARE he would mark B, etc.

TESTS WITH ONLY TWO CHOICES

Certain structures are not so amenable to being put in the form of problems with three alternatives. A typical example is the pattern involving a giver and a receiver with the prepositions TO and FOR. For example:

(36) Mrs. Conroy made a cup of coffee....
A. to her busband *B. for her husband

(37) She offered a cup of coffee....
*A. to him B. for him

When this type of problem is included, allowance must of course be made for the higher statistical probability of guessing correctly.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PROBLEMS GIVEN ORALLY

This brings the technique of dictation one step further in that it involves structural manipulation in addition to a clear understanding of the cue sentence and the ability to write it. There is virtually no limit to what can be tested by this technique: active to passive transformations being only one of hundreds of possibilities. It is hardly necessary to point out that it should be given only to students who have made some progress in writing and that the problems should be selected so that what the student has to write is not overly long.

PREPARING THE TEST SCRIPT

The teacher first lists in order of importance the separate grammatical structures and related vocabulary items to be tested. The number of questions to be set must then be determined and the test planned so that more questions are allotted to important structures and fewer questions to structures of relatively minor importance. The time allowed for the test must also be taken into account: It is safe to allow about 30-seconds for each question. Each section of the test must be preceded by clear and consise explanations illustrated by examples, so that the students will know exactly what is expected of them. For students at the beginning level, these explanations should be in Japanese.

Each of the questions set should conform to the following criteria:

(1) It is designed to test the students understanding and recognition of a definite structure and accompanying vocabulary problem already covered in classwork.

(2) There is no ambiguity in the alternatives given. It may happen that under certain circumstances two of the alternatives could equally be chosen. This must be avoided.

(3) The question does not test artificial correctness. For

example, the student should not be asked to choose between *I wish I were* and *I wish I was*, forms equally acceptable to educated speakers.

(4) The question is not given in such a sophisticated form that it requires ingenuity not related to language ability.

RECORDING THE TEST

It is assumed that the recording equipment and facilities available are sufficient to produce a tape which can be heard at least as clearly as the teacher's voice in the classroom. Most schools in Japan now have machines and conditions for meeting this requirement without difficulty.

If possible two voices should be used; one for giving the question, the other for giving the various choices.

A normal conversational speed of speech should be maintained, as any attempt to emphasize the point being tested by artificially distorting the natural rhythm of the sentences would defeat the purpose of the test.

The correct timing of pauses on the tape is important. Sufficient time must be given for the student to react to the question, but if the time interval between the choices is too long, the student may have forgotten the first by the time he hears the third. In most cases the student should be able to mentally produce his answer first and then check it against the possible answers as they appear. Therefore the main pause after the question should give the student time to mentally formulate an answer after which the alternatives should be given fairly rapidly at intervals of one or two seconds.

EVALUATION OF THE TEST

Once the test has been prepared and recorded, it still remains to check its reliability. In other words, it should give reasonably consistent results when taken by several groups of students who have reached the level of proficiency for which it has been designed; and these results should conform statistically to the bell-shaped distribution curve obtained when the number of students is plotted against

their performance. If it is found that a certain question is consistently missed by almost all students, that question should be replaced. It is recommended that the teacher who has prepared the test try it out on a group of his colleagues before giving it to the students. The results of this experiment may sometimes be surprising and give a good indication as to whether or not further modifications are needed.

WHAT ABOUT SPEAKING ABILITY?

To what extent can aural comprehension tests as described above be used as assessments of a student's ability to speak English? Is there a direct correlation between his ability to understand to speak? In order to answer these questions accurately, more data would be required. It would be necessary to construct speaking tests of the same degree of reliability as that of a number of aural comprehension tests corresponding to the same levels of proficiency. The results obtained would then have to be compared for a sufficiently large number of students so as to give statistically reliable data. The difficulty is, however, that in the present state of the art of testing, there are no highly reliable speaking tests which can be placed on a par with corresponding aural comprehension tests.

Nevertheless, there are speculative and subjective experiential factors which do point to a close relationship between the grades obtained in a good aural comprehension test and the ability to speak. The skills of understanding and speaking are closely related and are taught together. Understanding usually develops faster, but, given satisfactory teaching, it is reasonable to assume that the speaking skills also develop at a related pace. Furthermore, the teacher in the classroom should be able to make a reliable, though not quantitative, judgement as to his students speaking ability and to classify them to some extent in the order of this ability. If aural comprehension tests of grammatical structure give results in agreement with such classifications, this is good evidence for their validity as assessments of skill in speaking. Over a period of five years the writer has had the opportunity of subjectively assessing the performance of small groups of students in the classroom and comparing this assessment with the grades they obtained in

tests of the type described. Such comparisons have clearly demonstrated that there is a close correlation between a student's ability of speak and his performance in these tests.

SUMMARY

Hearing Testを利用して文法構造の理解と語い力をテストする際の理論と技術を多くの具体例を使つて詳述する。

この種の問題を自力で作ろうとされる先生方に、(イ)テストの項目 (ロ)特殊な構文の各種テスト法 (ハ)テスト問題の原稿と録音の準備等に注意を喚起することで実際的なお手伝いをする。

(イ)正しい応答文を選ぶ (ロ)陳述や質問にたいする正しい答を選ぶ (ハ)原文が示す内容に合致する正しい文を選ぶ等の各種客観形式のテスト問題を実例で示す。

発音能力を伸ばす手段として、この様な Hearing 形式のテストは非常に有効である。よく工夫されたこの種のテストに高い点をとる学生は、同時に、実際の発表能力においても秀れていることは指導の実例の中で明らかである。

（四方万二）

❁

Pattern Drill: From the Peace Corps *Volunteer* by way of the Texas FLA *Bulletin* we report the following real life pattern drill, quoting a Peace Corps volunteer teaching English in Thailand: "Teacher: This is a chair. Students: This is a chair. Teacher: This is a mango: Students: This is a mango. Teacher: Table. Students: This is a table. Teacher: That. Student: This is a that. Teacher: No, think please. Student A: This is a think please. Teacher: No, a thousand times no (pause). Very Bright Student: That is a table. Teacher: Ah! Correct..... Eye. Student B: I is a table. Student C: I *am* a table. Exit teacher." (From *Hispania* Dec ember 1963.)